

BARRIERS TO STUDENT LEARNING AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIVENESS

May 2001

OVERVIEW

At its July 2000 and January 2001 meetings, the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) received status reports on the study of barriers to student learning and institutional responsiveness outlined in the Board's 2000 Master Plan for Higher Education. These status reports summarized the study process undertaken to solicit information from the higher education community, and presented a categorized listing of the barriers identified by administrators, faculty and students at the public institutions (Attachment A).

This report summarizes the results of the review and identifies barriers representing significant constraints to institutions and students where corrective actions are considered feasible.

BACKGROUND

The 2000 Master Plan for Higher Education, *The 21st Century Learner: Strategies to Meet the Challenge*, adopted five goals reflecting the Board's policy that the interests and needs of learners must be the fundamental priority of the state's higher education system. To this end, the Master Plan called for a comprehensive review of how existing regulations or practices at the state and institutional levels create unwarranted obstacles to student progress and meeting program demand. The Board asked the faculty, students, and administrators of the public colleges and universities to help identify how existing regulations or practices at the state and institutional levels could be changed to better meet learning needs and support the role and mission of the institutions. An important part of this review was the identification of possible demonstration projects or "opportunity zones" to test proposed solutions.

At its July 2000 meeting, the Board discussed the study process, and emerging themes or issues based on a series of discussions with the project stakeholders -- institutional representatives, faculty, and students from public colleges and universities.

At its January 2001 meeting, the Board reviewed a framework which divided the identified issues and obstacles into the following four categories:

1. Identified Obstacles Where Action Has Been Taken
2. Identified Obstacles and Solutions Which Are Currently Being Studied
3. Laws, Rules, and Policies That Need Clarification

4. Areas in Need of Further Evaluation and Prioritization by the HECB and Project Stakeholders

This classification provided a framework to focus on the priority and feasibility of those obstacles and solutions where corrective action had not already been taken or planned. Since January, HECB staff have held additional discussions with the project stakeholders to (1) review the obstacles contained in the fourth category and (2) determine “high-priority” barriers to student learning, which could be realistically and successfully addressed by the higher education community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

HECB staff recommends that the Board focus on a limited number of “high priority” obstacles where feasible solutions exist. This approach will allow the universities, colleges, and HECB to track progress in correcting the circumstances creating the barrier to student learning and institutional responsiveness.

I. Immediate Focus on Transfer and Articulation Issues

Of the various obstacles reported in the review process, those concerning effective **transfer and articulation** between and within the two- and four-year public sectors represent the most immediate and significant opportunities for reducing barriers to student learning and institutional responsiveness. In the review process, stakeholders shared anecdotal information concerning the consequences of ineffective transfer and articulation policies or practices, such as **excessive course make-up**.

Other issues related to transfer and articulation include the following:

- The need for a General Education Requirement Transfer Agreement between the four-year institutions;
- The importance of ensuring the availability of lower-division course work for students attending the branch campuses and the need to reimburse the community and technical colleges for the cost of providing GER or other lower-division courses to students enrolled full-time at the branch campuses; and
- Credit transfer limitations resulting from designating community college courses as part of a technical curriculum.

Efforts Already Underway

A number of efforts are underway to address improved transfer and articulation. Many of these activities are cooperative direct transfer agreements generated through the Intercollege Relations Commission (ICRC), such as the Associate in Arts Degree and the two Associate in Science Degrees. Other efforts originate through the Inter-institutional Committee on Academic Program

Planning (ICAPP) or dual admissions/concurrent enrollment (e.g., University of Washington and Shoreline Community College). There are also individual institutional initiatives. For example, The Evergreen State College has negotiated 230 Upside-down Degree options and Big Bend Community College has negotiated a direct transfer of their Aviation Degree with Central Washington University.

Although these efforts are important, there is **no coordinated, system-wide prioritized plan to address all aspects of this issue**. More empirical information is needed to fully understand the magnitude and consequences of the problem, thus allowing remedial efforts to focus on the areas of greatest need.

Development of a Prioritized Action Plan

HECB staff recommends the initiation of a comprehensive assessment of transfer and articulation practices within and between the public universities and colleges. This assessment would include extensive collaboration and coordination with the public institutions of higher education and would begin with a fact-finding phase to identify specific areas of transfer and articulation that warrant improvement.

The Policy and Planning Committee would oversee the review, identify and report to the Board on specific areas in need of improvement, and recommend a prioritized action plan to address identified problems.

If the Board concurs, the Committee would work with HECB staff in preparing a detailed project schedule and scope of work for Board consideration at its July 2001 meeting.

II. Ongoing Identification of Barriers to Student Learning and Institutional Responsiveness

In the course of the current review activity, two important lessons were learned. First, barriers or obstacles resulting from a new law, policy, or rule often are not anticipated or recognized until the implementation or administration of the new practice. Second, a barrier often exists because of confusion or misinterpretation of a law, policy, or rule.

Accordingly, it is recommended that the HECB, in collaboration with the public universities and colleges, conduct a biennial review of barriers and report results in each four-year update to the Master Plan for Higher Education.

Resolution 01-26 is attached for Board consideration.

ATTACHMENT A					
ACTION CATEGORY	STAKEHOLDER-IDENTIFIED OBSTACLE	STAKEHOLDER-IDENTIFIED SOLUTION	POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS		ACTION
			Law/Rule Change	Fiscal Impact	
<i>Action Has Been Taken</i>	Insufficient funding for technology	Increase technology funding	No	Yes	Additional funding recommended by HECB for the 2001-2003 biennium
	Lack of adequate preparation in basic math, writing, and computer literacy	Certificate of Mastery and effective articulation between secondary and postsecondary education	No	Yes	Funding for the Competency-based Admissions project is included in the HECB 2001-2003 budget recommendations
	Insufficient funding for diversity	Increase diversity funding	No	Yes	Additional funding recommended by HECB for the 2001-2003 biennium
	Lack of adequate funding for supporting students with disabilities	Additional funding	No	Yes	Additional funding recommended by HECB for the 2001-2003 biennium
	Educational Opportunity Grant program two-year limitation	Allow three years of program eligibility	Yes	Yes	The EOG study adopted by the Board in December 2000 authorizes awards for up to eight quarters (or equivalent)
	Designation of courses at a community college as part of a technical curriculum limits transfer ability	Identify courses by the competencies acquired	No	Yes	Funding for the Competency-based Degree pilot program was included in the Board's 2001-2003 budget recommendations
	Difficulty in hiring and retaining faculty, especially in high-tech fields	Additional funding	No	Yes	Additional funding recommended by HECB for the 2001-2003 biennium

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<i>Action Has Been Taken (continued)</i>	Lack of child care	Adequate funding	No	Yes	Continued funding for child care grants recommended by HECB for the 2001-2003 biennium
	Requiring students at public four-year institutions to enroll for a minimum of two credits per quarter	Eliminate the requirement	Yes	Yes	This issue will be considered as part legislative agenda
	Unavailability of required courses	Reduce bottle-neck courses	No	Yes	Continue to monitor the graduation efficiency index
	Lack of ethnic diversity	Increase minority representation	No	Yes	Additional funding recommended in the 2001-2003 biennium
	The need for undergraduate students to work at outside jobs	Increasing and extending the State Need Grant program	No	Yes	Additional funding recommended by HECB for the 2001-2003 biennium

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<i>Changes to Current Law or Policy are Currently Being Studied</i>	Students and advisors do not have consistent information concerning prerequisite requirements due to non-standardized common course numbering systems	Require a common course numbering system for all public institutions	Yes	Yes	The Intercollege Relations Commission is examining this issue. Additionally, the University of Washington is conducting a pilot study of the Course Applicability System (CAS).
	Prohibition of doctorates at branch campuses except in exceptional circumstances	Modify statute and policy to allow doctoral level programs	Yes	Yes	HECB staff are reviewing current policies and practices of other states
	Incompatibility of semester vs. quarter systems for transferring students	Standardize	Yes	Yes	HECB staff presented a report on this issue to the Board for consideration at its December 2000 meeting

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<i>Changes to Current Law or Policy are Currently Being Studied (continued)</i>	<p>HECB program review and approval process limits the institutions' ability to respond quickly to student program demands</p> <p>HECB policy of limiting degree duplication</p>	<p>Authorize institutions to initiate/maintain new programs concurrent and contingent with HECB review</p> <p>Authorize the "migration" of programs approved at one site to other sites</p> <p>Grandfather all currently approved programs for delivery at all sites</p> <p>Authorize delivery of any existing programs at any site contingent on a minimum enrollment level</p> <p>Eliminate the marketing restriction during pre-approval phase for all programs that currently exist in the institution's catalog</p> <p>Authorize branch campuses to offer any program that is offered by the main campus</p> <p>Limit HECB review and approval to selected types of programs</p>	Yes	No	The HECB approved a resolution to modify existing program review and approval guidelines at its January 2001 meeting

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<i>Clarification of the Current Policy or Law is Needed</i>	Prohibiting graduation deficient 12 th grade students from qualifying for Running Start	Modify WAC	No	No	HECB will send a letter to the head counselor at each high school explaining current program rules
	Inability to offer high-demand self-sustaining programs due to I-601 fee increase limitations	Exempt fees, charges, and tuition associated with self-sustaining programs from fee increase limitations	No	No	The Office of Financial Management will be asked to clarify the provisions of I-601 with the public institutions
	Difficulty in getting transfer information from public four-year institutions and lack of consistency in interpreting privacy regulations	None identified	No	No	The Office of the Attorney General will be asked to provide a summary of current law requirements. This information will be transmitted to the universities and colleges.
	12 credit rule for 100% financial aid	Establish a fund dedicated to providing “mini” grants for students wanting/ needing to take less credits	No	No	The HECB will clarify current law and rules with the Washington Financial Aid Association at its summer 2001 meeting
	Exclusion of home-schooled students from the Promise Scholarship program	Change regulation	No	No	Revise program brochure to make explicit home-schooled student eligibility
	Financial aid restrictions on repeated courses and developmental courses are counter to student success	Change regulation	No	No	The HECB will clarify current law and rules with the Washington Financial Aid Association at its summer 2001 meeting

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<i>Clarification of the Current Policy or Law is Needed (continued)</i>	The “150% financial aid limit” is unfair for students who are significantly under-prepared	Change regulation	No	No	The HECB will clarify current law and rules with the Washington Financial Aid Association at its summer 2001 meeting

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<i>Issues to be Further Evaluated and Prioritized by the Rules Review Stakeholders</i>	CTC/SMS computer system prevents students from accessing degree audits and does not differentiate between intents	New system	No	Yes	Each of the issues contained in this category will be reviewed with the project stakeholders. This review will evaluate the identified obstacle and assess its relative priority as a barrier to student learning. A work plan for those issues identified as a high priority where improvements are considered feasible will be developed.

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<i>Issues to be Further Evaluated and Prioritized by the Rules Review Stakeholders (continued)</i>	Lack of a direct transfer agreement between public four-year institutions for general education requirement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Include in statewide transfer agreements a generic general education agreement that specifies that students who meet the general education requirement at any one public four-year institution meet the same requirement at all public four-year institutions; or 2. Transcripts or catalogs from all public four-year institutions should indicate how courses are used to meet the general education requirement. 	No	No	

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<i>Issues to be Further Evaluated and Prioritized by the Rules Review Stakeholders (continued)</i>	Excessive coursework “make-up” for transfer students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shared advisors program 2. Transfer by Major program 3. Sharing transcript data 4. Community College AS Degree 5. Course Applicability System 6. Community colleges should clearly identify academic transfer courses in their catalogues <p>Two- and four-year institutions should develop common lower-division course prerequisites for professional programs in business and engineering</p>	No	No	Each of the issues contained in this category will be reviewed with the project stakeholders. This review will evaluate the identified obstacle and assess its relative priority as a barrier to student learning. A work plan for those issues identified as a high priority where improvements are considered feasible will be developed.
	Financial aid allocations are made late in the academic year award cycle causing unnecessary reallocations and less than optimal aid packaging	State allocations should be better aligned with campus award cycles	Yes	No	

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<i>Issues to be Further Evaluated and Prioritized by the Rules Review Stakeholders (continued)</i>	Branch campus students are often required to enroll at two institutions to correct deficient lower-division coursework due to statutory restrictions on branch campus course-level offerings	Authorize the branches to “explore a range of options” including: offering “ramp-up” transition courses and prerequisite courses, and creative partnership agreement with community colleges	Yes	Yes	Each of the issues contained in this category will be reviewed with the project stakeholders. This review will evaluate the identified obstacle and assess its relative priority as a barrier to student learning. A work plan for those issues identified as a high priority where improvements are considered feasible will be developed.
	Inflexibility of admissions and tuition policies regarding undocumented students domiciled in Washington	Modify current law and rules	Yes	No	
	Multiple tuition for full-time branch campus students taking general education requirements (GER) or lower-division courses at community colleges	Establish policy waiving tuition costs at community colleges for full-time branch campus students enrolling in required GER or lower-division prerequisites	Yes	Yes	
	Existing residency requirements	Modify statute to include in the definition of “resident student” new students who are employed full-time	Yes	No	

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<i>Issues to be Further Evaluated and Prioritized by the Rules Review Stakeholders (continued)</i>	Lack of course availability due to the state employee and National Guard tuition exemption	State funding of FTE's generated by matriculated students receiving these exemptions	Yes	Yes	
	SBCTC program review processes are not responsive	Streamline the process to allow colleges to be more responsive	No	No	
	Inability to effectively plan and initiate new high-demand programs due to unbudgeted start-up expenses	Establish a funding basis and mechanism for appropriating start-up funds	No	Yes	
	Inadequate funding formula (FTE)	Recognize full cost of service and non-FTE driven expenditures	Yes	Yes	
	Lack of ethnic diversity	Increase minority representation	No	No	
	Incompatibility of K-12 and postsecondary schedules impacting Running Start students and parents of school-age children	Standardize	Yes	Unknown	
	Incompatibility between policy of charging full tuition for 10 or more credits and financial aid rules requiring 12 or more credits for full-time aid award	Modify law and rules	Yes	Unknown	

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<i>Issues to be Further Evaluated and Prioritized by the Rules Review Stakeholders (continued)</i>	The use of a nine-month academic calendar	Annualize the academic calendar – offer state-funded programs on a twelve month basis	Yes	Unknown	
	Inflexible financial aid funding mechanisms	Institutional management of financial aid	Yes	Yes	Each of the issues contained in this category will be reviewed with the project stakeholders. This review will evaluate the identified obstacle and assess its relative priority as a barrier to student learning. A work plan for those issues identified as a high priority where improvements are considered feasible will be developed.
	Inconsistent federal and state financial aid regulations	HECB and SBCTC should work together to align state and federal regulations	Yes	No	
	The number of work hours required for the Work Based Learning Tuition assistance program is excessive	Change regulation	Yes	No	
	Labor and Industry retraining grants of one year are insufficient to meet student needs	Allow two years	Yes	Yes	

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<i>Issues to be Further Evaluated and Prioritized by the Rules Review Stakeholders (continued)</i>	Lack of an alternative method for students to progress through developmental courses	Offer a math or English intervention class required for two-time failure students	No	No	
	Credit load requirement for Work Study and State Need Grant eligibility is too high	Change regulation	Yes	Yes	

RESOLUTION NO. 01-26

WHEREAS, In the 2000 Master Plan for Higher Education, *The 21st Century Learner: Strategies to Meet the Challenge*, the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) adopted five goals reflecting the Board's policy that the interests and needs of learners must be the fundamental priority of the state's higher education system; and

WHEREAS, The Master Plan called for a comprehensive review of how existing regulations or practices at the state and institutional levels create unwarranted obstacles to student progress and meeting program demand; and

WHEREAS, HECB staff undertook the review in collaboration with faculty, students, and administrators of the public colleges and universities; and

WHEREAS, Preliminary findings of the review were presented to the Board at its meetings of July 2000 and January 2001; and

WHEREAS, The final report, *Barriers to Student Learning and Institutional Responsiveness*, recommends that a comprehensive assessment of transfer and articulation practices within and between the public universities and colleges be undertaken and that a coordinated system-wide plan for this assessment be developed; and

WHEREAS, The report also recommends that the HECB conduct a biennial review of barriers and report results in each four-year update to the Master Plan for Higher Education; and

WHEREAS, At its meeting of May 14, 2001, the Board's Policy & Planning Committee reviewed the final report and concurs with the reports recommendations;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Higher Education Coordinating Board adopts the recommendations of the final report and requests that the Board's Policy & Planning Committee work with HECB staff in preparing a detailed project schedule and scope of work for Board consideration at its July 2001 meeting.

Adopted:

May 30, 2001

Attest:

Bob Craves, Chair

Kristianne Blake, Secretary